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RUEHSJ/AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE 2039
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SUBJECT: MARTINELLI'S SECURITY LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGY
REMAIN UNCLEAR

REF: PANAMA 00571

Classified By: Ambassador Barbara J. Stephenson for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Security Leadership Muddle

11. (S//NF) Six weeks into the Martinelli Administration, the make up of the GOP security leadership is complicated and unclear. The Minister of Government and Justice Jose Raul Mulino is exerting control over formal communications between the Embassy and the various security services, but there is little sign that the MOGJ is exerting either strategic or tactical control over the security services. Individual service chiefs, including Panamanian National Police (PNP) Director Gustavo Perez, National Aero-Naval Service (SENAN) Director Rigoberto Gordon, and National Frontier Service (SENAFRONT) Director Frank Abrego seem to be treating the MOGJ only as an administrative facilitator to process budget requests. On operational issues, both tactical and strategic, they are acting on their own, with minimal coordination among themselves, and with no strategic leadership from above. What coordination there is among security services, is usually the result of Embassy intervention. Multiple sources report that the service chiefs and other officials responsible for security are under intense pressure from President Martinelli to deliver immediate results.

12. (S//NF) This situation has been exacerbated by the creation of the Secretariat for Security in the Ministry of the Presidency, to which former drug prosecutor Jose Almengor was recently appointed. Vice Minister of Government and Justice for Security Alejandro Garuz told PolOff August 3 that Almengor's job description was very similar to his own, and that the Minister of Government and Justice, Jose Raul Mulino, was not sure what Almengor's job was, or how it would effect the Vice Ministry of Security. Jaime Trujillo, Executive Secretary of the Council for Public Security and National Defense (CSPDN or Consejo), told EmbOff August 8 that Almengor was "just Jimmy's security advisor" in reference to Minister of the Presidency Jimmy Papadimitriu,

and did not have a significant security role. Mulino was later quoted in the newspaper suggesting that Almengor's office might become the nucleus of a future Ministry of Security.

Varela Concerned, Plans to Play a Greater Role

13. (S//NF) VP/FM Juan Carlos Varela told the Ambassador August 4 that he was concerned about the fragmented and chaotic manner in which security policy was being made. He said that there was a struggle for power over the security apparatus between Mulino and Papadimitriu, and that as a result he intended to intervene and take personal control of the security issue. He asked the Ambassador to coordinate the Embassy's security agenda directly with him in bi-monthly meetings.

Mulino's Role?

14. (S//NF) On July 24 Charge met with Mulino to get a read out of his recent trip to Colombia, where press reports indicated security agreements had been reached. In a two hour meeting, Mulino described at length the Colombian prison system, and how he hoped to improve the Panamanian prison system. Mulino made general remarks about the high level of the Colombian delegation, but did not elaborate on any agreements, and stayed focused solely on prisons. According

to Manuel Zambrano, the new Director of the Integral Security Program (PROSI) at MOGJ, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) is investing in an analytical and strategic planning unit in the MOGJ as part of the \$20 million loan the IDB gave Panama several years ago to improve citizen security. While this unit could be very helpful, Mulino's apparent weakness on security issues calls into question whether such a unit will be able to play a useful role without an empowered minister.

Trujillo Up to the Job?

15. (S//NF) During most of the Torrijos Administration, the security coordinating role largely fell to the Consejo, where Secretary General Erik Espinosa and his deputy Javier Fletcher maintained tight operational control over all the security services, and coordination with the USG. While they were effective in some ways, their somewhat unsavory reputation led Colombia and Mexico to restrict their security cooperation with Panama, all of which had to run through Consejo. Martinelli's removal of both men apparently prompted better cooperation with Colombia. However, it is not clear that Trujillo, who until July 1 was the head of security at Martinelli's Super 99 super market chain, is really up to the job. There are indications that the new deputy, Aldo Macre, may be very competent, and that he has a very good working relationship with Trujillo. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen how much power he will have to pull the security apparatus together in a coherent way.

McKinsey to the Rescue?

16. (S//NF) The GOP has hired the U.S. consulting company McKinsey to help them with strategic planning. They are working on a government wide proposal, and one specifically aimed at improving the security system. Post is cooperating closely with McKinsey, which is basing its recommendations on the same set of best practices Post has used (focus on gang prevention, community policing, strengthening the police as an institution, including effective internal affairs), in the hope that the government will accept the advice for which they are paying.

Comment

¶6. (S//NF) It is unclear to Post if Varela can bring coherence to the GOP security muddle, but he is smart, rational, and clearly committed to strengthening Panama's democratic institutions, so we will do our best to help him succeed. Given the weak and muddled security leadership at the moment, Post will proceed cautiously as we build up high level GOP support for our various security initiatives, knowing that a "yes" from one actor may have no buy-in beyond that actor. We will keep all USG entities informed about progress in developing a coherent security strategy in order to minimize the risk of USG entities getting drawn into uncoordinated and potentially harmful initiatives - and there is no shortage of them at this early stage of the Martinelli government.

STEPHENSON